

Warrants*

Earlier we compared the process of constructing an argument to taking a trip. If evidence is the starting point and the claim is the destination, then the warrant is the means by which you travel from the starting point to the destination. It is the way of getting from one place (evidence) to another (claim). A warrant provides a connection: it takes evidence for granted and establishes a relationship between the evidence and the claim.

The most obvious and apparent part of any argument is the claim; the claim stakes out the arguer's position. After the position is stated, evidence becomes an essential element. The warrant, the third element of argument, sometimes is not even stated as a part of the argument, but it is perhaps an argument's most distinctive feature. The warrant, whether stated or unstated, is the reasoning process that connects evidence to claim. Warrants are distinctive because they frequently separate arguments into common types. For instance, certain kinds of warrants regularly appear in "arguments by analogy," while others are used in "arguments from principle." Still other warrants are apparent in "arguments by dissociation." In each of these cases as well as others, warrants most clearly identify the type of argument employed.

Evidence and claims are usually explicitly stated parts of arguments, but very frequently warrants remain unstated. Because warrants are so closely associated with patterns of reasoning, debaters can take advantage of those familiar patterns and leave the warrants unsaid. We discuss the use of unstated warrants in some of the examples that follow.

This chapter describes several different kinds of warrants but certainly does not exhaust the kinds debaters have at their disposal. The warrants we discuss do, however, represent some very commonly used methods of connecting evidence and claims. The table below provides an overview of the warrants we examine in depth:

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